Talib with the gun—that's an Afghan man, and he will go and live his life like other Afghans live their lives."

If one source of national identity comes from the battle against Al Qaeda interlopers, another is waiting patiently in a leafy suburb of Rome: the country's exiled king, Zahir Shah, whose overthrow in 1973 ended a 200-year-old monarchy. Although few Afghans advocate the restitution of the monarchy itself, many seek the 87-year-old king's return, to serve as the symbolic head of a *loya jirga*, an ancient Afghan tradition in which tribal and religious leaders convene to make national decisions (see "Circle Game," November 12). Although Zahir Shah hails from the Pashtun's dominant Durrani tribe, the cosmopolitanism of Afghan court life allowed him to transcend ethnic parochialism. (While king, he spoke French better than Pashto, for example.) So both Pashtun and non-Pashtun Afghans have embraced his return. In early October leaders of the Northern Alliance struck a deal with Shah's supporters to begin proceedings for a *loya jirga*; later that month some 800 Pashtun tribal leaders from Afghanistan's South held a meeting in Peshawar, Pakistan, in which they affirmed their support for the king.

IN A SENSE, the Taliban's rapid collapse is testament to the strength that national and local Afghan identity still enjoys. Because of their international composition and emphasis on religious rather than national allegiance, the Taliban never successfully appealed to Afghan nationalism. Indeed, because of the Taliban's ties to Al Qaeda, many Afghans regarded them as an essentially foreign force. And by the same token, while the Taliban consolidated power by appeasing local leaders—buying their neutrality or support with money or promises of positions—once in power they largely ignored tribal identity, preferring an all-encompassing religious fanaticism. Slogans popular among the Taliban faithful included: "I am first a Muslim" and "I don't have a *qawm*." The Taliban's reclusive leader, Mullah Omar, imprudently installed Pashtuns from Kandahar in leadership positions throughout the country, and favored one particular tribe, the Durranis, to the relative exclusion of all others. The result was that the Taliban built few ties to local tribal leaders—leaders who quickly turned on the Taliban when their vulnerability became apparent.

The United States and its allies can avoid these mistakes, and begin to overcome the Pashtun/non-Pashtun divide, by utilizing the same national and tribal identities that the Taliban largely discounted. For starters, there is Zahir Shah's return. Plans for a *loyal jirga* have stalled in recent weeks, as the Northern Alliance has seemed to lose interest in dealing with the ex-king. As one royalist told Agence France-Presse last week, "The alliance leaders inside the country have either become too proud ... or they are really too busy." It would not be a sign of ingratitude for the United States to remind our Northern Alliance allies that Rabbani is not a symbol of Afghan national identity; Zahir Shah is. As soon as possible, the king should publicly begin planning a *loya jirga*. Even if the assembled Afghan leaders resolved little on their own, their deference to a distinguished Afghan tradition could help unite the country nonetheless.

Even more important is a focus on *qawm*. As soon as the fighting dies down, the United States and its allies should approach tribal leaders with an offer—and an implicit threat. America should ask them to distribute reconstruction aid to their supporters; if the leaders refuse, or steal the aid, or continue to feud among themselves, we should make the same offer to a more compliant tribal representative. As Barfield says, "Let's turn them into ward politicians, not warlords." The creation of roads, schools, and jobs will help cement Afghan allegiance to these pro-Western leaders. And, as Goodson suggests, if we can "keep the local elites down on the farm, they won't be in constant battle with one another on the national level."

The late Louis Dupree, one of world's foremost scholars of Afghanistan, described the country's history as a dialectic of centrifugal and centripetal forces—a contest between "fusion and fission." By harnessing tribal identity in service of national unity, the United States might just channel the energies of fission for the project of fusion. It is a project that Afghanistan, and the world, badly needs to succeed. ■

San Francisco Dispatch

Disoriented

By FRANKLIN FOER

THE OFFICIALS OF the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) began planning its 2001 conference last fall. Among the 144 panels they ultimately scheduled for the gathering, held last weekend in San Francisco, were discussions on "Islam, Globalization and Feminist Networks" and "Civil Society and the State in Yemen." But it wasn't until the suicide hijacking of four American airliners that the conference organizers must have realized an omission: There was no planned discussion of terrorism. To correct the oversight, a seminar on "September 11: Responses and Future Implications" was hastily cobbled together.

Given that MESA is the discipline's premier organization—drawing professors from Israel and the Arab world as well as the United States—one might have anticipated a controversial session. One would have been wrong. In response to the American University of Cairo's Bahgat Korany's description of "anti-American rage on the Arab street," a large mustachioed man rose from the audience. "The word 'Arab street' has racist connotations. It implies an unthinking mob," he exclaimed. Korany quickly backed down.

The panel and the audience came together on the war against terrorism, too: They don't like it. "We have not shown that our actions differentiate us from those who attacked us," Georgetown University's Michael Hudson told the hotel ballroom. His co-panelist from Villanova, Ann Lesch, simply assumed that her listeners were against America's war, and proceeded directly to the question of how to persuade the public to oppose "the United States' hegemonic role in the

region." There was a brief moment of suspense when a woman from the audience, shaking with anger, approached a microphone to ask Lesch and Hudson a question. But her rage, it turned out, wasn't directed at them. "We have appropriated the Egyptian and Israeli methods of dealing with terrorism. This destroys the credibility of America lecturing anyone about human rights, blah, blah, blah." She received an ovation.

That MESA's members oppose the war is hardly surprising; they are academics, after all. But unlike other academics, what MESAns think actually matters: They're the ones who are supposed to produce the scholarship on Islam and the Arab world that deepens our understanding of the terrorists, their motivations, and their sympathizers. There's even the possibility, post-9/11, of Middle East scholars convincing Congress and private foundations to pump large sums into their departments. But if the MESA conference is any guide, it won't do much good. For the past decade, professors of Middle East Studies have generally apologized for Islamism and called "terrorism" a racist term. And in San Francisco last weekend, they showed no signs of reconsidering.

THERE WAS ONE universally acknowledged villain at the conference—it just wasn't Osama bin Laden. No, the man everyone loved to hate was "Middle East Quarterly" Editor Martin Kramer, author of the recently published *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America.* (When Lesch mentioned Kramer's name, some in the audience actually hissed.) The MESAns have good reason to be defensive: Kramer's arguments cut to the core problem with Middle East scholarship. As Kramer describes it, for the first half of the twentieth century, there was no Middle East studies, only orientalism. Housed in stuffy Oxbridge institutes and infused with the spirit of British imperialism, the orientalists focused largely on antiquity, and a few even romantically described Arabs as heroic desert savages. Not until the early days of the cold war did American universities open institutes for Middle East Studies. Unlike orientalists, Middle East Studies professors focused on the contemporary scene, applying modern social-science methods and embracing the ideology of the cold war. Progress in the Middle East, they argued, required modernization. The late UCLA professor Malcolm Kerr described the field's conventional wisdom this way: Muslims had "little choice but to learn from the West... to search out the secret of its progress."

But the 1970s shook the discipline's faith in its cold war axioms. The Iranian revolution and the Lebanese civil war cast doubt on the inevitability of Westernization. These doubts were compounded by the scathing critique leveled by Columbia literature professor Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism*. The American scholars, Said charged, hadn't embraced objective social science, but merely repackaged orientalism to service their government's neo-imperialist foreign policy. In part, his critique was conspiratorial: "[A]nything said about Islam by a professional scholar is within the sphere of influence of corporations and the government." And in part, it was epistemological: When scholars impose Western concepts and interpretations on Muslims and Arabs, they can't grasp the full dynamism of their subjects. *Orientalism* fit the zeitgeist perfectly. In addition to Said's timely critique of the modernization thesis, the implication of his argument—that only Muslim and Arab scholars could escape orientalism's limitations—jibed with the academy's growing obsession with identity politics.

It was, in short, a kick in the gut to the cold war liberals who had founded MESA in 1966. So instead of trying to beat Said, they joined him. As Said wrote in his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*, "During the 1980s, the formerly conservative Middle East Studies Association underwent an important ideological transformation.... What happened in the Middle East Studies Association therefore was a metropolitan story of cultural opposition to Western domination." Indeed, it's difficult to overstate *Orientalism*'s influence within the field. The historian David Gordon has described the book as "almost Koranic in its prestige."

Kramer shows how Middle East scholars took Said's argument and transposed it to political science. Terrorism and fundamentalism were suddenly racist, reductionist concepts. Instead, the new Middle East Studies consensus viewed the insurgent Islamists as avatars of "civil society" and opponents of state authoritarianism. Americans who failed to glimpse Islamism's democratic promise, argued Georgetown's John Esposito, needed "to transcend their narrow, ethnocentric conceptualization of democracy." At the San Francisco conference, a tenured professor who didn't want to be identified told me, "You don't get tenure by praising American policy." Marius Deeb, who teaches modern Middle East politics at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies, told me, "There's a uniformity, and sometimes one gets frustrated with the taboos. For instance, one can't publicly disagree with the statement that Lebanese Hezbollah is a resistance movement." And so, Kramer argues, the discipline of Middle East Studies ignored the Al Qaeda threat. As Esposito put it in 1998: "Focusing on Osama bin Laden risk[s] catapulting one of many sources of terrorism to center stage, distorting both the diverse international sources (state and nonstate, non-Muslim and Muslim) of terrorism."

SEPTEMBER 11 MAY have dramatically altered the global order, but it hasn't altered MESA's worldview. In San Francisco, presenter after presenter referred to "so-called terrorism" or "terrorism in quotation marks." In one typical panel, the University of Arkansas's Gwenn Okruhlik defended the fundamentalist opponents of the Saudi regime as latter-day Fabians: "They're calling for redistribution of wealth and social justice. They want rule of law." When Wayne State University professor May Seikaly described Israel's 1948 victory as ushering in the *Nakba*—Arabic for "catastrophe"—her audience nodded furiously. And, at the seminar on September 11, nearly 20 scholars asked questions of the panel; only one, a professor from Baltimore Hebrew University, tentatively challenged the prevailing view. "One could argue that the September eleventh attack occurred because of the failure of the U.S. government to respond to the first World Trade Center attack...." But Georgetown's Hudson summarily dismissed him: "This is an argument that one hears often in the

media." By contrast, when an elderly professor hobbled to the microphone to say, "We ought to be reminded of our responsibility for Hiroshima and Nagasaki and understand that we're not so good," he received a round of applause. The panel's moderator, the University of Massachusetts's Mary Wilson, responded, "That hardly needs a response. I'm not sure we could add anything." And no one did.

Ironically, while anti-Americanism reigned at the MESA conference, it was suffering a serious blow in the Muslim world itself—as Afghans thanked the United States for helping liberate them from the Taliban. Which made me wonder whether MESA, which has tried so hard to authentically understand Islamic and Arab points of view, may be behind the times once again. At a Starbucks across from the conference headquarters at the Hyatt, I eavesdropped on a conversation between two attendees, a Jordanian man and an American woman. They were old friends, catching up on one another's lives since last year's MESA meeting. The woman, with closely cropped hair and faded jeans, spoke of her new tome on women in Islam. "It occurs to me that jihad might be a useful rhetorical strategy," she told her friend. "Women can use the excuse of holy war to justify a greater role in the public sphere." After a while, the conversation made the inevitable loop back to the subject of the moment. The Jordanian spoke about the crisis in Islam: "I hate all this talk about how Islam isn't to blame. We know the truth." The comment didn't quite register with his friend. "Yeah, that's right," she said, "The media talks about blameless Islam, but turns around and calls attention to 'Islamic terrorism'"—drawing the quotation marks in the air. The Jordanian didn't correct his friend's misinterpretation, nor allow it to interrupt his train of thought: "Perhaps this will be a mixed blessing," he continued. "Some good will come. My dream: We recognize our folly and adopt Jeffersonian liberalism." The women chuckled: "Do you really want it?" ■

Kabul Dispatch

Bad Memory

By ELIZABETH RUBIN

AT A NORTHERN ALLIANCE checkpoint just north of Kabul, I bumped into Allah Mohammad and his rowdy soldiers, whom I'd last seen manning the front lines around the bombed-out cinema near the Bagram airport shortly before the attack on the capital. On one side of the road was a red container. Inside, in front of a stack of Dubai sacks of sugar, sat a Taliban prisoner in a baby-blue *salwar kameez*, the ubiquitous traditional regional dress, with his arms wrapped around his legs. On the other side of the road, another young prisoner was cowering inside a shaggy lean-to rigged up out of old tarp, coats, and tree branches. Allah Mohammad and his soldiers were charged up from their victory, bragging about how many foreign terrorists they'd each killed last week. They were eager to show off their prisoners, and aggressively hauled one of the Taliban men out into the road, as if they were going to beat or kill him for sport.

"Don't. Don't. Don't hit him. Stop," an American journalist shouted. "Doesn't Islam say you're supposed to treat prisoners well?"

Of course, said one of the soldiers. "But last year when we had the front lines in this place and we were retreating to Panjshir they killed fifty of our soldiers.... They're brutal with us."

At which point my American colleague's driver shouted, "Beat them until they tell us where their weapons are."

"Don't say that. Tell him to stay out of it," my colleague said to one of the translators.

Then my driver squatted down next to the prisoner and said, "Fuck off, Osama. Osama's the husband of your mother. I hate you. Why did you bring Pakistan and the Arabs here to destroy our country? You killed our great Ahmed Shah Massoud. If I'd captured you, I would have killed you. But now we're telling these soldiers not to hit you because we are kind."

Farid, a clean-shaven, blue-eyed, Northern Alliance soldier, told us that it was true—Islam does say to treat prisoners-of-war well. And my driver, despite his outburst, told a story about Ahmed Shah Massoud wrapping his coat around a Russian soldier whom he'd just taken prisoner on a freezing mountainside. "I didn't want to beat him," said Farid about one of the two prisoners. "I was kind and generous with him. I brought him tea and bread. But he kept lying to us, and until I hit him four times he wouldn't admit he had weapons."

My American colleague said, "I know they beat you, but it has to end somewhere."

Allah Mohammad, the 26-year-old commander who'd lost ten relatives in the past three months, put his arm around the terrified Taliban prisoner and said, "Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen. Don't worry."

As he led him back to the tarp, a bright, white Land Cruiser slowed to pass through the checkpoint. In the front passenger's seat, a clean-shaven guy with a buzz cut suddenly pulled a green-and-white Afghan scarf up over his face. And the three similar-looking men in the back seat all turned their heads away from us in unison. It was a dead giveaway, and we all started to laugh, realizing that these tough American special forces were trying to hide their identities. The car began to accelerate away, and my American colleague cried out, "Hey man, you guys did a great job." And then he muttered, "Shit, I should have told them to go kick more Taliban ass."

It was a visceral moment, born of the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States and the evidence of sinister intent we'd been finding all week in the abandoned houses of the Arabs and Pakistanis who'd occupied Kabul. Chemical weapons formulas, documents about how to destroy cities and big buildings, advertising for flight-training schools. Nevertheless, the moment died quickly and we turned back to Allah Mohammad and the prisoners to ask them about the dead Arabs and Pakistanis we'd just seen in a vineyard and in the

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